



FY2025

The Civic Federation

ANNUAL REPORT



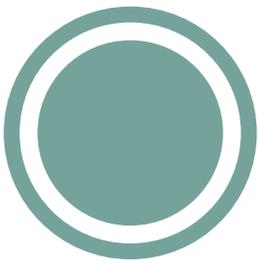
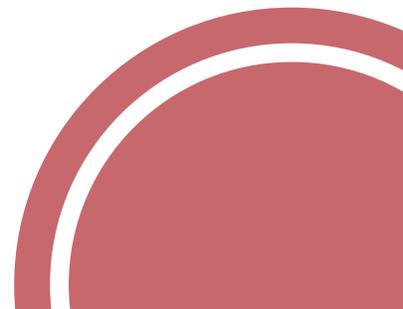


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Mission and Vision

➔ Mission

To provide research, analysis, and recommendations that:

- Champion efficient delivery of high-quality government services;
- Promote sustainable tax policies and responsible long-term financial planning;
- Improve government transparency and accountability; and
- Educate and serve as a resource for policymakers, opinion leaders and the broader public

➔ Vision

That all residents and leaders in Illinois and the Chicago region are empowered with the education, insights, and fact-based research to effectively advocate for and promote sound government practices and policies.





Letter from the Chair and President

Dear Civic Federation Community,

In periods of great transition and change, reflection matters. FY2025 was an immense year for the Civic Federation, full of milestones, successes, rapid responses, and lots of growth; more than can fit in one Annual Report. But we hope these pages exemplify what this small but mighty organization has been up to and leave you with an understanding of how large the organization looms in our city and our region.

The year started out strong in November 2024, when the Federation's Board of Directors approved a new Strategic Plan—the first in more than a decade. Shaped and supported by a pro bono team from Crowe LLP and informed by extensive engagement with more than 250 stakeholders, the process created needed space to mine and interrogate the past. The ending document reflects both where the Civic Federation has been and where it must go to best serve the 21st-century needs of the public in the organization's 130th year and beyond.

Throughout this process, we heard a consistent message: our community values the Civic Federation as a trusted, non-partisan, independent voice on public finance and governance, and sees opportunities to strengthen and modernize the organization to extend its impact. FY2025 marked the first year of putting that vision into action.

Across all four strategic pillars—Stronger Together, Sustain Our Future, Reimagine Engagement, and Amplify Our Voice—the Civic Federation made meaningful progress this year.

We reset and strengthened our internal governance structure and practices to better model the standards and behaviors we ask of governments, modernized fundraising and membership, re-established and expanded foundation support, and exceeded our fundraising goals for signature events. At the same time, we reimaged how we engage with members, policymakers, and the public through expanded programming, briefings, and convenings that foster informed dialogue and connection.

The Federation also remained highly visible in public discourse. While maintaining signature long-form research and analysis, we prioritized real-time short-form reports, statements, op-eds, and briefings. All of our work drove debate on major fiscal and governance issues and controversies locally and regionally, most notably concerning city, state, and Chicago Public Schools budgets and policies. Our analysis reached wider audiences than ever through growing local and national media coverage and expanded digital engagement, reinforcing the Federation as a reliable resource amidst uncertainty and decision-making.

Taken together, FY2025 was a year of self-reflective, forward progress—grounded in our mission, guided by our Strategic Plan, and made possible by the dedication of our Board, staff, partners, and supporters. We are grateful for their continued thought leadership and trust and look forward to the work ahead.

Jill Wolowitz
Chair

Joe Ferguson
President

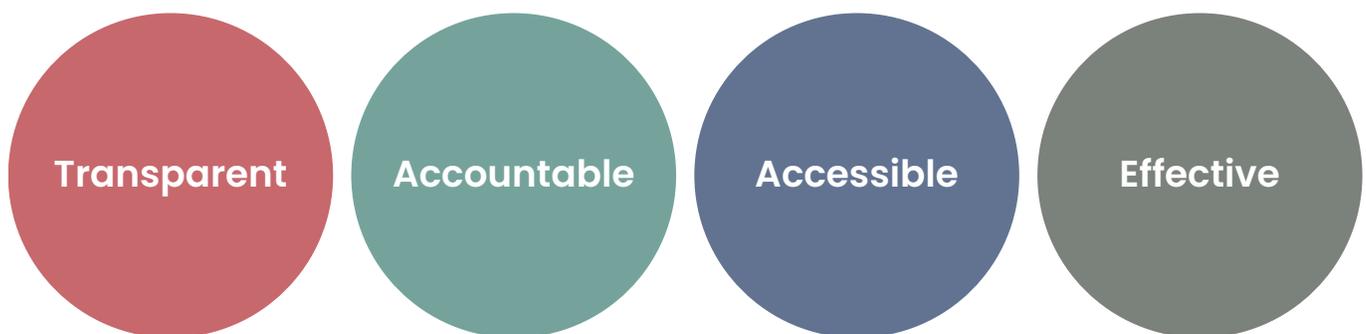
Strategic Reframing

This year, the Civic Federation reframed how we think about our work, in order to best address the challenges facing our governments today.

To be their best, we believe that government must operate in ways that are:



Achieving this in a way that fosters legitimacy and inspires public confidence requires a foundation built on systems that are:



Within this, our focus is on two core areas of expertise:



Government Finance:
Fiscal Stability & Sustainability



Governance:
Structure, Effectiveness & Accountability

Fiscal Policy

Promotion of sustainable, equitable revenue structures and budget frameworks

Throughout FY2025, the Civic Federation played a sustained and visible role in shaping public understanding of fiscal challenges facing governments across the Chicago region and Illinois. Our work spanned city, state, and school district finances, combining timely analysis, policy recommendations, and active engagement with decision-makers.

Chicago Public Schools

Anticipating a particularly challenging year for Chicago Public Schools (CPS), the Federation published a mid-year financial landscape analysis outlining the district's fiscal risks and policy options. Throughout the spring and summer, we remained actively engaged with policymakers and partner organizations, contributing to informed public dialogue during a critical budget cycle. As a result of the Civic Federation's and partner organizations' advocacy, school district leadership and the Board of Education passed a budget that avoided taking out a loan that would have damaged CPS' finances for years to come.

Illinois

At the state level, the Federation produced an economic analysis and fiscal roadmap in advance of the Governor's proposed FY2026 budget, calling for a more strategic and sustainable approach to taxing and budgeting. This work was followed by a detailed review of the Governor's budget proposal. In partnership with the Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning (CMAP) and other organizations, the Federation also advocated for modernization of Illinois' sales tax base to better reflect today's service-driven economy.

THE CIVIC FEDERATION

Authored by Roland Calia, Grant McClintock,
Annie McGowan, Lily Padula, and Daniel Vesecky

February 12, 2025

Chicago

The Federation played an active role in the City's FY2025 budget process, helping inform City Council members about the importance of addressing structural imbalance, debt levels, and the use of one-time revenues such as tax increment financing. We produced a forward-looking roadma outlining the City's urgent financial challenges and providing immediate non-revenue and revenue options for FY2025, along with long-term recommendations to better position the City in the future. Later in our fiscal year, Policy and Research Director Annie McGowan participated in the Mayor's budget working group to help identify potential strategies for addressing the City's projected FY26 deficit.

Pension Reform

The Federation weighed in on two key pension issues during FY2025. First, through testimony and open letters we advocated against a state bill that increased pension benefits for Tier 2 Chicago police officers and firefighters. Second, we called for the CPS and City of Chicago to resolve the disputed pension payment for the municipal employee's pension fund, an issue that has yet to be disentangled between the two government entities.

Property Tax

The Federation, in collaboration with the Civic Federation's Property Tax Committee, produced several property tax-related reports, including a primer on the tax extension process in Cook County, analysis of dropping property tax collection rates in some parts of suburban Cook County, and a number of annual reports that keep tabs on rates, full value, and tax burden. In collaboration with the University of Chicago, we also published a first-of-its-kind report on the property tax cap law in Illinois—the Property Tax Extension Limitation Law—finding that tax caps have not been fulfilling their originally intended purpose of controlling runaway tax bills due to various exceptions and carve-outs.

Spotlight on CPS Series

As Chicago Public Schools entered a pivotal budget season, the Civic Federation released a series of educational reports clarifying the District's fiscal challenges and options for FY2026 and beyond. The three-part series examined the drivers of the projected structural deficit, evaluated the feasibility of revenue and cost-containment strategies, and provided critical historical and pension context to inform long-term decision-making.

Governance

Promotion of transparency, accountability, and efficiency in governance structures

Throughout FY2025, the Civic Federation advanced its long-standing role as a leader on governance reform, producing research and analysis focused on modernizing public institutions, improving accountability, and strengthening decision-making structures across the Chicago region and Illinois.

Government Consolidation

The Federation continued our long-time work on government efficiency and consolidation by examining special purpose districts, including mosquito abatement districts, townships, and road districts. This research highlighted opportunities to reduce fragmentation, improve service delivery, and strengthen oversight. It also highlighted where there have been recent successes, including a series of consolidations and dissolutions of special purpose districts in Lake County, Illinois.

Spotlight on Road Series

As part of its governance work, the Civic Federation released a series of reports highlighting the real-world consequences of Illinois' complex and overlapping government structure. The series used real-world examples of roads in different parts of Cook County to identify inefficiencies, governance gaps, and reform options.



GOVERNANCE, TRANSPARENCY, AND FINANCES

THE CIVIC FEDERATION
Authored by Roland Calia
March 25, 2025



Transit Governance

During the spring legislative session, the Federation worked closely with partner organizations to advocate for governance reforms at the Regional Transportation Authority and the CTA, Metra, and Pace systems. This work emphasized the need to address governance challenges in advance of resolving the region's significant transit funding shortfall and ultimately led to the Illinois General Assembly passing landmark transit reforms to create a new centralized transit oversight agency for the northeastern Illinois service boards

CPS Board Transition

As Chicago prepares for the transition to a fully elected and independent CPS Board of Education in 2027, the Federation emerged as a leading voice calling for clearer governance and financial separation between CPS and the City of Chicago. These efforts positioned the Federation to engage in ongoing state and local discussions around resolving the disputed municipal pension contribution and broader fiscal challenges facing the District.

Chicago Municipal Constitution

A remerging area of work for the Federation in FY2025 was the potential role of a municipal charter for the City of Chicago. The Federation published the first in a series of short reports examining how a city charter could enable structural reforms and improve budgeting, financial management, and governance practices

Department of Early Childhood

The Federation debuted work in an emerging area of research on early childhood as the State of Illinois consolidates multiple programs and departments, overseeing a total of \$3 billion in funding, into a single department. Our work in this area is focused on ensuring a smooth transition to the newly created department and follow-through on process improvements, system simplification, efficiencies, and improved education outcomes for Illinois children.



Events

Policy Forum

On September 3, 2025, the Civic Federation and the Federal Reserve Bank of Chicago co-hosted the 20th Policy Forum:

Taxing Times, Smarter Strategies: Resilient Tax Structures for a Changing Economy

At the Forum, civic, business, philanthropic, and government leaders participated in a full-day discussion on the future of Illinois' tax system and the importance of transparency in public finance.

The Forum explored how Illinois' current tax structure is working—and where it is falling short—alongside lessons from other states on budgeting for results. A highlight of the day was a fireside chat on rebuilding public trust in government featuring Kil Huh of The Pew Charitable Trusts and legendary journalist Carol Marin, underscoring the critical role of clear communication and accountability in effective governance.

*"It's the job of the elected leaders to communicate what government is doing,"
- Kil Huh, Pew Charitable Trusts*



Carol Marin and Kil Huh



Kim Murnieks, Sophia DiCaro, Shelby Kerns,
Adam Slade



Steve Edwards



Elizabeth Kepner, Shelby Kerns, Paula Worthington, Michael Pagano, Kim Murnieks, Carol Marin,
Sophia DiCaro, Steve Edwards, Kim Rueben, Adam Slade, Joe Ferguson, Kil Huh

A Year of Thoughtful, Consistent Programming

Throughout FY2025, the Civic Federation convened members for regular, research-driven programming designed to deepen understanding of Illinois' most pressing fiscal and governance challenges and to create space for candid, informed dialogue.

Through our **Speaker Series** and **Budgets & Bevvies** series, Civic Federation staff and invited experts examined topics including:

- The fragmentation of Illinois' local government system and opportunities for consolidation
- The financial outlook for Chicago Public Schools, including long-term structural pressures
- Illinois' state and local budget processes and emerging fiscal risks
- Governance reform tools, such as a potential Chicago City Charter

Extending the Conversation

Beyond formal events, the Civic Federation advanced its mission by engaging in broader civic, national, and international dialogue throughout the year.

Staff and leadership participated in the Governmental Research Association Annual Conference, contributing to national conversations on federal uncertainty, state and local finance, and the evolving role of independent research organizations. The Federation also welcomed international delegations from Israel and Europe, facilitating exchanges on Illinois' governmental structure, budget challenges, and comparative governance models.

Closer to home, we joined community-based conversations on Chicago Public Schools, including a CPS parent roundtable hosted by the NAACP Chicago Westside Branch, reinforcing the organization's commitment to public education and accessible fiscal information. A co-hosted screening of *Drop Dead City* further connected fiscal history to present-day challenges facing Chicago.



Annual Civic Awards

Investing in Tomorrow

The Annual Civic Awards is the Civic Federation's signature event, which pays collective tribute to the extraordinary civic contributions of Chicago-area leaders and institutions. The event theme, Investing in Tomorrow, highlighted our commitment to elevating Chicago's next generation of leaders and entrepreneurs. As we look toward the city's bicentennial in 2037, we believe our collective investment in today's emerging talent will shape the region we are tomorrow.

With over 450 of Chicago's civic and business leaders in the room, we presented the following awards:

Gage-Msall Award for Outstanding Civic Contribution by Chicagoans

James Reynolds, Jr.

*Founder, Chairman, and Chief Executive Officer, Loop
Capital*

Addams-Palmer Award for Exemplary Civic Involvement by a Chicago Institution

Hyatt Hotels Corporation

Accepted by Mark Hoplamazian, President and CEO

The program included special remarks by Governor JB Pritzker, Cook County Board President Toni Preckwinkle, and Mayor Brandon Johnson, and a fireside chat with the honorees, moderated by Brandis Friedman, Alexandra and John Nichols, Chief Correspondent and Anchor of WTTW's Chicago Tonight.



Brandis Friedman (left to right), Michael Fasnacht, Joe Ferguson, James Reynolds, Jr., Hon. Brandon Johnson, Mark Hoplamazian, Jill Wolowitz, Jennifer Steans



Mark Hoplamazian



James Reynolds, Jr.

Memorable Moments



Hon. JB Pritzker
Governor
State of Illinois

"Jim is a champion of economic empowerment and is deeply committed to uplifting underserved communities. Hyatt's civic engagement has been an incredible asset to Illinois."

"In order to do well at one end, you have to do well at the beginning. I'm known to call on you. People respond to you when they really feel you're genuine, care, and tackling things that aren't necessarily popular to champion but are necessary. There's no city like Chicago."



Jim Reynolds, Jr.
Founder, Chairman,
& CEO
Loop Capital



Mark Hoplamazian
President & CEO
Hyatt Hotels
Corporation

"Hospitality is magic. [At Hyatt,] anybody who has been engaged with a young person who has been given an opportunity and they seize that opportunity, have seen the retention and promotion rates are higher. There is a ripple of impact through the businesses, community, and individuals."

"Jim has always remained committed to the city that raised him and he's dedicated to empowering the next generation of Chicagoans."



Jennifer Steans
President & CEO
Financial Investments
Corporation

Motorola Solutions Foundation Excellence in Public Service Award

The Motorola Solutions Foundation Excellence in Public Service Award is the Civic Federation's recognition of Illinois' non-elected public officials and unsung leaders working behind the scenes to make our region a better place. With over 260 people in the room, we honored:

2024 Honoree

Juan Salgado
Chancellor, City Colleges of Chicago

The breakfast event was filled with energy, led by Veronica Herrero, Executive Vice Chancellor, Chief Institutional Advancement Officer and Chief of Staff, City Colleges of Chicago, and an award presentation by Cynthia Yazdi, Senior Vice President of Communications and Brand, Motorola Solutions. The fireside chat between Chancellor Salgado and Sylvia Puente, President and CEO, Latino Policy Forum, brought laughter and important reflection on the importance of supporting students.



Juan Salgado and Sylvia Puente



*Sylvia Puente (back left to right), Karem Perez, Joe Ferguson, Cynthia Yazdi
Juan Salgado (front left to right) and Veronica Herrero*

Memorable Moments

"[Juan] has helped to increase graduation rates to a record high, launch numerous initiatives, and partner with businesses and organizations to give students the best chance to succeed."

Brandon Johnson
Mayor
City of Chicago



Rahm Emanuel
Former U.S.
Ambassador to
Japan and Former
Mayor, City of
Chicago

"[Juan] has never forgotten where we came from, why he loves this city, and why he thinks the next generation should be built on the shoulders of all of us. His passion for education, the future, and kids comes through his excitement every day."

"[Juan] is fundamentally a great guy. You just know that he has such a great big heart for the students and their challenges and doing everything that he can to provide education for the student base that needs it."

Lori Lightfoot
Former Mayor, City
of Chicago



Juan Salgado
Chancellor
City Colleges of
Chicago

"[City Colleges of Chicago] is the most consequential institution to the local communities in the City of Chicago. In the public sector, you can make big impact, you can make scalable impact, and you can decide to grow things that are working."



Financials

	<u>2025</u>	<u>2024</u>
Assets		
Cash	\$ 895,198	\$ 635,754
Investments	4,319,718	4,079,104
Accounts Receivable	152,355	177,065
Grants Receivable	305,000	
Prepaid expenses and other assets	78,470	53,326
Right-of-use operating lease assets	91,615	195,055
Leasehold improvements and equipment - Net	<u>52,068</u>	<u>107,787</u>
Total assets	\$ 5,894,424	\$ 5,248,091
Liabilities and Net Assets		
Liabilities		
Accounts payable	\$ 43,191	\$ 12,640
Deferred revenue	82,000	61,000
Accrued wages	4,809	422
Accrued vacation	20,356	35,419
Lease liabilities - Operating	<u>142,798</u>	<u>305,551</u>
Total liabilities	293,154	415,032
Net Assets		
Without donor restrictions:		
Undesignated	753,955	753,955
Board designated	<u>4,079,104</u>	<u>4,079,104</u>
With donor restrictions	-	-
Total net assets	<u>5,601,270</u>	<u>4,833,059</u>
Total liabilities and net assets	\$ 5,894,424	\$ 5,248,091

FY25 Publication Listing

Fiscal Policy

[Estimated Effective Property Tax Rates 2013-2022](#)

[City of Chicago FY2025 Roadmap: Key Financial Challenges, Options and Recommendations](#)

[Op-Ed: How do we resolve Illinois' pension mess? These 10 principles are a start.](#)

[Cook County Effective Tax Rates Return to Pre-2008 Patterns](#)

[State of Illinois Enacts \\$50.9 Billion FY2025 Capital Budget](#)

[Cook County Proposes Responsible \\$9.89 Billion FY2025 Budget That Does Not Include Tax or Fee Increases](#)

[High Chicago Debt Burden Contributes To City's Fiscal Challenges](#)

[Chicago's FY2025 Proposed Budget Exacerbates Structural Imbalance](#)

[Cook County Pension Fund FY2023 Update](#)

[Estimated Full Value of Real Property in Cook County: 2013-2022](#)

[Total Chicago Property Tax Burden Rose by \\$2.7 Billion, or 53.3%, Between Tax Years 2014 and 2023](#)

[Total Cook County TIF Revenue Increased \\$93.1 Million in 2023](#)

[Chicago Increases TIF Sweep to Close Budget Deficit](#)
[Financial Landscape Analysis of the Chicago Public School District: FY2025](#)

[Chicago Public Schools' Reserves and Cash Flow Issues, Explained](#)

[Illinois Economic Landscape and Fiscal Structure](#)

[State of Illinois FY2026 Budget Roadmap: Landscape, Issues, and Recommendations](#)

[Chicago's FY2025 Enacted Budget Remains Structurally Imbalanced](#)

[From Referendum to Reality: How the Forest Preserve District is Spending Its Third Year of Increased Tax Revenue](#)

[Modernizing Illinois' Sales Tax: A Pathway to a Sustainable Future](#)

[Illinois Proposed FY2026 Budget Overview](#)

[How Illinois' Spending Compares to Other States: The Tension Between Pensions vs. Public Services](#)

[Illinois Sees Sustained Progress on Long-Term Debt Reduction in FY2026](#)

[Medicaid in Illinois: What Federal Cuts to Medicaid Funding Could Mean for Illinoisans](#)

[Op-Ed: State lawmakers still have time to adopt a measured fix for Tier 2 pension problem](#)

[Letter: A Joint Appeal for Transparency and Prudence on Pension Reform](#)

[Letter: A Joint Appeal to Reject HB3657](#)

[Testimony: Building a Modern, Equitable Revenue System for Chicago](#)

[CPS Series: Understanding the Components of CPS' FY2026 Projected Structural Deficit](#)

[CPS Series: How Chicago Public Schools' Pensions Work: An Explainer](#)

[Medicaid Cuts Enacted Under the Federal Budget Reconciliation Bill](#)

[Examining Illinois' Public Workforce: Three Decades of State Personnel Trends](#)

[Op-Ed: Gov. JB Pritzker should veto bitter pension sweetener for Chicago](#)

[The Cook County Property Tax Extension Process: A Primer](#)

[Op-Ed: The Mayor and City Council Should Use These 10 Principles to Steer Chicago to Fiscal Stability](#)

[The State of Illinois FY2026 Enacted Budget](#)

[Op-Ed: Chicago Public Schools can't afford to bail out City Hall](#)

[Op-Ed: CPS has a chance to break its cycle of borrowing and crisis](#)

[CPS Series: Setting the Record Straight: How Tax Increment Financing \(TIF\) Actually Interacts with the Chicago Public Schools](#)

[Statement: Civic Federation on CPS FY2026 Proposed Budget](#)

[Property Tax Collection Rates in Cook County: Trends, Disparities, and Fiscal Implications](#)

[Dashboard: FY2024 Illinois Federal Grant Funding](#)

[Mayor's Budget Working Group Report: The Start of a Long Overdue Conversation](#)

[Chicago Public Schools FY2026 Budget Overview](#)

[What is Equity-Based Budgeting](#)

[Dashboard: Local Pensions](#)

FY25 Publication Listing

Governance

Op-Ed: [Use Chicago's budget crisis to prompt a management overhaul at CPD](#)

Statement: [Civic Federation, BGA, and CTBA Statement on Budget Transparency Ordinance](#)

Op-Ed: [Stakeholders: The new Chicago Board of Education must take ownership of CPS](#)

Op-Ed: [As biz leaders, we value public transit. But before we pay more, we need this.](#)

Op-Ed: [How Mayor Brandon Johnson should invest in infrastructure while under financial constraint](#)

[Chicago Public Schools: Building Underutilization](#)

[Cook County Mosquito Abatement Districts: Governance Structure, Transparency, and Finances](#)

Testimony: [Seize the Moment: Regional Public Transit Needs Structural Reform, Not Tweaks](#)

[The Civic Federation Supports Efforts to Lower Barriers to Township Consolidation](#)

Op-Ed: [Joe Ferguson and David Greising: It's time to slash the number of Illinois local governments](#)

Op-Ed: [Joe Ferguson: How Chicago transit is governed requires reform before the state rescues it with cash](#)

Road Series: [How many governments maintain Greenbay road?](#)

CPS Series: [History of School Finance Authority](#)

[What is a City Charter and How Could Having One Help Chicago?](#)

Road Series: [A Tale of Three Cook Counties: Geographic Disparities in Road Conditions](#)

Road Series: [Too Many Cooks? Exploring Road Maintenance Across Government Layers in Glenview](#)

Testimony: [Confronting CPS' Deficit and Structural Issues](#)

[Inspector General Report Finds Continued Ethical and Administrative Lapses at South Cook County](#)

[Mosquito Abatement District](#)

Testimony: [Reforming Cook County Mosquito Abatement Districts](#)

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Policy and Research
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Paula Worthington

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Mahnour Ashraf (from top left), Daniel Vesecky, Joe Ferguson, Roland Calia, Grant McClintock, Annie McGowan, Karen Hamilton, Jill Wolowitz, Ellen Morris Palermo, Lily Padula, Jaye Hobart

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